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Gandhian Ideals: The Power of Truth and Non-violence

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Abstract

Gandhi was a profound advocate of the principles of Truth and Non-violence. Truth or 'Satya' and Ahimsa or Non-violence constitutes the essential foundations of Gandhian philosophy. The term 'Non-violence' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Ahimsa'. Gandhi asserted that, in its positive connotation, Ahimsa signifies the largest love, the greatest charity'. Furthermore, he affirmed that Ahimsa binds human beings to one another and to God, thereby functioning as a powerful unifying force. Gandhi also wrote that 'Ahimsa and Love is one and the same thing'. According to him, the word 'Satya' originates from 'Sat', meaning to exist'; thus, by Satya he refers to that which is not only existent but also morally and ontologically true. Gandhi maintained that Truth and Non-violence are two sides of the same coin, or more precisely, of a smooth, unstamped metallic disc for which the distinction between obverse and reverse becomes irrelevant. In this framework, Ahimsa represents the means, while Truth constitutes the ultimate end. This paper is examined the Gandhian conception of Truth and Non-violence in a comprehensive and detailed manner.

Keywords: Gandhian, Satya, Ahimsa, non- violence, Truth etc.

Introduction:

Gandhi was a great supporter of Truth and Non-violence. He had a great importance to the concept of Truth and Non-Violence. Truth or Satya, Ahimsa or Non-Violence is foundation of Gandhi's philosophy. The word 'Non-violence' is a translation of the Sanskrit term 'Ahimsa'. He stated that in its positive form,'Ahimsa' means 'The largest love, the greatest charity'. According to Gandhi the word 'Satya' comes from the word 'Sat' which means 'to exist'. So by the term 'Satya' Gandhi also means that which is not only existent but also true. Gandhi said that Truth and Non-Violence are the two sides of a same coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which the reverse? Ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. Gandhi identifies Truth with God. According to many philosophers God is the highest reality. At the same time Gandhi says that there is nothing besides Truth. So both Truth and God stands for the highest reality or the ultimate reality. And hence the two can be identified. He said that there is no person in earth who can deny Truth. God can be

denied because the atheist does not believe in God. But the atheist cannot deny the power of Truth. Hence God is identified with truth.

Objectives of the paper:

1. This paper tries to focus the relation between Truth and Non-Violence.
2. This paper tries to focus how Gandhi influenced by satyagraha.
3. This paper tries to focus the identification of Truth and God.

According to Gandhi, Truth and Non-Violence constitute the Kernel of Gandhi's philosophy. He said that Truth stands for 'reality'. By Truth, according to Gandhi, we do not mean the character of proposition which is either true or false. Gandhi sometimes described Truth as existence, consciousness and bliss (sat, cit, and ananda).At first Gandhi used to say God is Truth. But later on he converted Truth is God. Therefore, according to Gandhi Truth is God and 'Satyagraha' is 'agraha' of and thus, it means holding fast to truth.

Gandhi explained the term 'Satyagraha' from various viewpoints. Satyagraha is not a weapon of the weak, the coward, the unarmed and the helpless. It is a weapon of the morally vigilant and the active. Satyagraha is not the traditional resistance of evil by evil. It is a resistance of evil by its opposite, i.e., by good. Satyagraha is essentially based on love. In fact, according to Gandhi, Satyagraha appears to be as a religious pursuit. It rests on a religious belief that there is one God behind everything and being, and as such the same God resides in every one of us. Gandhi also feels that a belief in rebirth is almost a pre-condition of Satyagraha. Satyagraha demands selfless and sincere pursuit of Truth without having any consideration of any advantage or gain, But, one will be able 'to walk on such a sharp 'razor's edge' only if he somehow believes that he will get the fruits of his good work, if not in this life, in subsequent life. Gandhi says, 'with the knowledge that the soul survives the body, he (the satyagraha) is not impatient to see the triumph of in the present body.''

Gandhi describes Satyagraha as a force against violence, tyranny and injustice. All these evils arise on account of a neglect of the 'Truth' that is all-pervasive and all-comprehending. Therefore Gandhi says that if we start resisting evil with evil, violence with violence, anger with anger, then we are only adding fuel to *Gandhian Concept of Truth and Non-Violence.*

The most effective force against these evils can be the one which would force them to evaporate, and that can be done only by Satyagraha. The aim of satyagraha is not to embarrass the wrong-doer. Its intention is to bring about, what Gandhi calls, a 'change of heart'. In fact, satyagraha is based on the pre-supposition that there are no 'enemies' or 'opponent', but that there are only wrong-doers. Satyagraha also demands extreme patience on the part of the Satyagrahi. A wrong-doer cannot see his wrong at once; he will take time to win over his anger and hatred. The Satyagrahi must wait patiently for the good sense of the wrong-doer to be aroused. Gandhi distinguishes Satyagraha from Passive Resistance. Firstly, Satyagraha is not a passive state; in fact it is more active than violence. Secondly in passive resistance, there is an element of force; it does not completely forbid the use of violence. In Satyagraha, on the other hand violence is completely forbidden even in the face of very adverse

situation. **Requirement of a Satyagrahi**: According to Gandhi, a Satyagrahi must possess a number of qualities and characters. Some of the basic ones are given below.....

1. A Satyagrahi must be basically honest and sincere.
2. A Satyagrahi must not have any mental reservations, he must be open-minded.
3. A Satyagrahi must be a disciplined soldier. Truth alone should be his master and conscience his guide. He should be loving, but firm.
4. This means that a Satyagrahi must be completely fearless. He must not fear anything worldly—even death.
5. Fearlessness leads to another virtue, sacrifice. A Satyagrahi must be prepared for the greatest possible sacrifice.
6. Suffering and Sacrifice have to be undergone in an attitude of simplicity and humanility.
7. Gandhi asserts that a Satyagrahi is required to practice truthfulness and non-violence not only in his action, but also in thought and speech.
8. A Satyagrahi must be firm in his dealings and behaviour.
9. There must be conformity between the thought and action of a satyagrahi.
10. Gandhi also recommends that the Satyagrahi must learn to put on restraints upon his own self.

Gandhi feels that a true Satyagrahi who has been able to fulfill the requirement mentioned above can work wonder. He alone can face the might of an army or even of an empire. **Ahimsa or Non-Violence**: Ahimsa or Non-Violence is the central concept of Gandhi's philosophy. According to Gandhi, Ahimsa or Non-Violence has a positive meaning also. In positive sense Non- Violence means 'love'. It means love towards all living creatures. The concept of non- violence is extended not only means to human love but love towards all sentient creatures of the world. That means one should not love only human being but every living being in the world. When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm; he will wish him well. He will not swear at him, and he will not cause him any physical hurt. He will put up with all the injury to which he is subjected by the wrong-doer. Thus Non-Violence is complete innocence. Complete Non-Violence is complete absence of ill-will against all that lives. Therefore, it embraces even sub-human life not excluding noxious insects or beats. Non- Violence is, therefore, in its active form goodwill towards all life. It is pure love. When the idea of Non-Violence in Gandhi's philosophy is analysed then a number of characteristics features stand out. In his book '**Social and Political Thought'** of Gandhi J. Bandyopadhyaya stated the following characteristics features of Gandhian Non-Violence.

1. Non-Violence is not the same as non-killing.
2. Non-Violence is not non-resistance born out of cowardice.
3. Non-Violence implies several positive values. These values include love, active, resistance to injustice, courage in the face of violence, non-possession, truthfulness and brahmacharya.
4. Non-Violence implies bread-labour, which Gandhi derived from **Ruskin** and **Tolstoy** and ultimately from the **Bible**. Gandhi defined it as the 'Divine Law that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands.'

5. Non-Violence is a higher value than life. Gandhi regarded Non-Violence to be an ultimate value on three grounds. First, it is universally applicable. Secondly, it enhances all other values without detracting from any. Thirdly, it is unlimited in its application.

Gandhi believed that Non-violence in its absolute form is not realisable in practice. But relative Non-Violence can be realised in practice. Gandhi stated that Justas the perfect straight line as understood by Euclid cannot be drawn. Similarly perfect Non-Violence cannot be attained. But limited Non-Violence can be attained. Gandhi stated that the Divine Spark is present within man and we must constantly endeavour to keep alive that Divine Spark. Gandhi therefore regarded Non-Violence to be the law of our species. But at the same time Gandhi recognised the point that the practice of total Non-Violence in our life is not possible. Gandhi wrote, 'Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward violence.' This violence is directed against life.

According to Gandhi Non-Violence is a perfect state. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously. He says, 'If we can manage to apply Non-Violence successfully at home, it will *Gandhian Concept of Truth and Non-Violence* in its pure form become an irresistible power in the service of the state. Non-Violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. Non- Violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means putting one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. The Gandhian concept of Non-Violence is dharma in action, and truth translated. It is not a static code of morality ready for adoption. It evolves and is in essence 'creativity morality', in the language of Bergson. Non-Violence is a dynamic and creative concept centered on truth. Truth, the supreme Gandhian value, is the consummation of all that is spiritual in man. He regards violence as an evil in itself. He does not consider it to be neutral. According to Gandhi 'Ahimsa or Non-Violence' is the means; Truth is the end. They are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them. They are the two sides of a coin. Ahimsa or Non-Violence should practice in the mental level. It means barring no ill-will against others. So, Ahimsa or Non-Violence is non injury to others not only in the physical sense but of in the mental sense also. Hence the concept truth and non-violence according to Gandhi has a very wide application. Gandhi is of opinion that 'Killing or Injury to life can be an act of violence only under certain conditions. These conditions are anger, pride, hatred, selfish consideration, bad intention and similar other consideration. Any injury to life done under these motives is 'himsa'. Thus, the negative meaning of Ahimsa is 'non killing or non injury,' but this presupposes that a non-violent act is free from hatred, anger, malice and the like. For example, when an animal which is going to die is suffering from intense pain in that case we may kill him to end his suffering or there may be cases when a woman has to safe dignity or owner against the criminal. In that case she can use violence in order to safe herself. So there are certain exceptions according to Gandhi to the law of violence. But for Gandhi, the positive aspects of Ahimsa are much more basic than its negative characters. Ahimsa is not merely refraining from causing injures to creature; it stands for certain positive attitude towards other living beings that one must cultivate. In its positive sense Gandhi said that Ahimsa represents one of the basic and essential qualities of mankind. That does not mean that violence does not have any place in life. In fact, even in preserving one's existence one has to commit himsa of

one kind or the other, and yet Ahimsa is considered to be the law of our species. In fact Ahimsa is nothing but Love. Love is a kind of feeling of oneness. In an act of love one identifies himself with the object of his love, and this cannot be possible unless there is an effort to free mind from every such disposition that prevents the spontaneous outflow of love. Therefore, Ahimsa demands a sincere effort to free mind from feelings like anger, malice, hatred, revenge, jealously etc., because these create obstacle in the way of Love. According to Gandhi, love is the energy that cleanses one's inner life and uplifts him, and as such, love comprehends such noble feelings as benevolence, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, generosity, kindness, sympathy etc. Gandhi believed that without the practice of Non-Violence Truth cannot be realised. Gandhi employed a curious argument to establish this point. Gandhi stated that God and Truth are identical. At the same time Gandhi accepted a pantheistic conception of God. He argued that God pervades all beings. All beings are united by God and the act of unification is made possible through love or Non-Violence. So Non-Violence is ultimately the cementing bond of the Universe that has its origin in God or Truth.

Conclusion:

In conclusion we can say that both Truth and Non-Violence are closely interrelated. They are the same sides of a same coin. A critical account of the Gandhian concept of Non-Violence shows that Gandhi was not aware of the deep rooted aggressive instinct in man. Contemporary psychologist have pointed out that this instinct plays a major role in the human mental life. Gandhi did not play sufficient attention to it. His account of Non-Violence seems to be more dependent on his readings of religious texts than on psycho-social considerations. This is a major critical point that may be raised against the Gandhian conception of Non-Violence. If Non-Violence is the expression of the life-instinct within man then violence is the expression of the death-instinct.

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